

March 11, 2020

To: Kansas House Education Committee

Fr: Robert A. Maile, Ph.D.

Re: SB 230

I am sharing my observations in support of Senate Bill 230. I believe this bill represents a next logical initiative on the road to barrier-free communication access for all Kansas citizens.

During the past half-century I have been employed in five different deaf education programs in four different states, and have visited many others. Here in Kansas I served on the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for 10 years, the Special Education Advisory Council for six years (one year as chairperson), and retired after ten years as superintendent of the Kansas School for the Deaf. A common concern wherever I've been has been an inconsistent, fragmented availability and implementation of communication access.

Commonly, there are some isolated regions where quality communication access is available and well administered, while much of the population throughout the state must make the best of less than satisfactory options.

A delightful difference in Kansas, and a primary reason I moved here, is a unique collaboration between and among a proactive deaf community with good leadership, cooperating service providers, and enlightened legislative support that has elevated awareness of deafness related issues and supported initiatives to address identified needs. This legislative body has supported (and continues to support) expanded statewide outreach services via the Kansas School for the Deaf, and the implementation of a Language Assessment Program which will facilitate English and American Sign Language fluency in all Kansas deaf children. The bill currently under consideration addresses the need to assure consistent, quality communication access for deaf children and adults of all ages.

Fragmented, inconsistent services of uncertain quality cannot be addressed or remediated in the absence of some unifying central authority. The Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has the statewide representation,

pool of knowledge, contacts, and respect necessary to address the identified needs. Implementation of this bill will enable the progress evident in some jurisdictions around the state to become common practice statewide.

I have spent my entire career working in state and county bureaucracies. I know that when a critical issue overlaps agency and jurisdictional boundaries, it is often left treading water for lack of decisive action. I am asking that you throw the accessible communication ball to the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and let them run with it. It's past time for this critical issue to be addressed.